

# THE MYSTERY AT THE GABLES

Entry No. 77 in Our Prize Story Competition

BY LILLIE HAMILTON FRENCH



There Was No Mistaking It Was the Lady of the Gables!

THE "Gables" takes as many secrets as the sea. Xanibers have I stumbled over; but none so stirring as that told me. This secret has been a haunting one for years, and to me a haunting question ever since that summer morning when from a top window of my Little Cottage, I first looked down on the reds and chimneys of her gabled house shut in by crowding trees.

Now, in the autumn, when the leaves have partly fallen, I can see not only the roof and chimneys, but the whole of a curiously curved window opening to the morning sun, with flowers in china pots, and an awning that is seldom lowered. I can see too, since the days have grown cold, the blue smoke of a big fire curling from a chimney above the roof, always in the morning and sometimes at night, as if made for the comfort of someone never at home during the day. When I asked my landlady on that summer morning, the name of my neighbor, it is a far short walk to the Gables, she shook her head and turned the subject, remarking with a peculiar smile, showing my from further questions, that so many people come and went she could not keep track of them.

With the coming of the early autumn, however, and its revelations, my curiosity was again aroused, and so I turned to my old Susette, my general mender, who has lived in the village all her life, and loves to gossip.

"Nobody knows who the lady is," she answered. "It has always been a mystery. The house has stood there

most a hundred years without a tenant, so my father told me; the chimneys were falling down, there were holes in the roof, the gate was so rusted it could not be opened, and the vines were so thick between the iron bars they had to be cut. Then, one day, carpenters and bricklayers appeared, and the house was made new, after that then more strange men who would not talk came from Paris, and unpacked splendid curtains and carpets on the lawn, and carried in a harp—that I saw myself; for I had stopped to see my father, who was helping. Then the men from Paris went away as silently as they came, and one night, after dark, the lady drove in, no one knew from where, and for weeks she shut herself away.

"But certainly you have seen her since?"

"Oh, yes, Mademoiselle—the lady is very good to the poor, and she rubs thumbs and forefinger together in the peasant's universal sign for money. You have not met her in the forest?" she asked.

"I don't see her."

"That is strange, for she is there all day when she is not mending the sick. She is very quiet, though, and very still, and may not wish to be disturbed by a stranger—and so she would likely step behind a tree to let you pass. Yes, she is always a mystery."

"Does the lady live alone?" I asked.

"Oh, no, there are three servants; but they say nothing, and no one has come for twenty years or more. Then there was a coach—father saw it—with crests on the harness. It was full of great people; for the gentle-

men stood bareheaded when the lady got out. And once there came a horseman, followed by a groom, who spent an hour looking the house, and then galloped off to one knows where, before anybody could get a look at his face. But the postman, used to leave a great many letters with various names, but not so many now, I hear. Look carefully next time you walk in the forest, and when you hear a footstep turn your head.

SEVERAL weeks passed in this way, and then came a late afternoon when I was on a long plateau. Suddenly at the farther end of a wood path I caught a glimpse of something moving.

The trees were still about the path, and the light filtered dimly, as through cathedral windows. A mouse shadow in the gloom the moving object seemed known to be alive only because it moved; known to be moving only because of the silhouette it tossed in its progress—a flickering shadow, not even differentiated as sound until it approached nearer, nor even as a special woman until she had reached within a few hundred feet of me.

By this time there was no mistaking it. It was not the forest gourd, gun in hand—it was the Lady of the Gables!

Something in the pose of her head with the peculiar tilt of the chin—the pose of a woman who looks over the tops of things, not under them—convinced me of her identity. But she was not "quiver," as Susette had said, nor had she tried to look behind a tree; instead she was walking straight toward me, her deep gray eyes on mine, her ungloved hand extended as she hastened her last steps.

"You are my neighbor, the American," she said, with a smile not unlike lighting up her face, but seeming to play through the low reticled bones of a mask as sweet as those of some wood land. "You live in the new house that I see from my window—your child handily's taste, I am sure, not yours. But can't we sit down a moment?" and she drew me to a fallen tree trunk. "I want to know you better; for we have the same things—the cup of death, and those great friends of mine, the trees."

I took my seat beside her, answering her as best I could, so bewildered was I by her personality. First, perhaps, yet age was not a part of her; her hair only faintly tinged with gray; her skin that color and fineness which in a woman is only a touch of youth and radiance; and her eyes deeply shrewd, with about her mouth there played a sympathy of waiting and wondering in its tremors.

She talked of many things—the old women bent with their backs, the poor mulemen galloping who passed, and the struggles they made to live, for we all the time searching into mine as if she would read my very soul. Then she left me, and I saw her figure with its gentle distinction fade away among the leaves. Not till she had gone did I gain possession of myself. Where had I seen her before?

THAT night a note arrived—she would take the same walk in the morning; would I join her? Then, much to my landlady's astonishment, there followed other notes, and other walks, and finally an invitation to the mysterious house, and even to the room that opens on the highway with its flowers in china pots. It was the room in which she slept.

What impressed me on first entering was its air of indescribable quiet, solemn, and refreshing as that of her own reposeful presence. By degrees, with could I take in details, the rich, but faded red gown the wall, and draped about the bed, the pale bed floor, and the old French chests of drawers. Above these hung full length portraits of her ancestors—a distinguished group of men and women, some in noble robes, some with swords, and all with thoughtful brows and firm, strong lips, giving to the room an odd effect of being somehow peopled by those with power to make themselves your friends.

Frequent visits followed to this room which no village ever enters—visits made fascinating by her talk of books and nature, as she sat and sewed her garments for the poor, I growing more and more mystified as to her real identity and that haunting resemblance to some familiar face, and more and more bewildered by her charm and tenderness. Intimate, the world would have called her; though I never escaped the sense of something subtly suggestive of barriers between us—she on the one side with her gentle aloofness from things personal, I on the other not wishing to cross the line, yet all astir and eager for the store of knowledge that this enchanting woman held. Each time we met I felt myself drawn the closer.

It walks and talks like these sped the early days of our acquaintance, until this afternoon when the postman, his head shrouded in a monk's hood, and his long cape beaded with raindrops, made a special trip to bring me another of her notes, the third this week.

"Look up your Little Cottage, *dear friend*, and come to me," it read. "In such a storm good friends should be together."

The forest trees were bending to the fury of the storm, and a gust of wind was at that moment spilling my hall with water. The postman suggested that I remain at home. Then her face rose before me, and the charm of her room with its brooding quiet. "In half an

hour," I answered, and in half that time I had started. She met me at the door, dressed, as was her habit, in a rapturous black relieved by bands of white at neck and wrists; she smiling like some ideal convent mother welcoming errant souls, until, my wraps removed by an attendant, she led me up stairs to the promised fire.

"It is good to be here," I sighed, as we took our seats beside the hearth. "My little cottage was so dreary! It is always so with me on rainy days."

Her gray eyes shone on me from under the dusk of her lashes. "I thought you might be lonely, Child. I'm glad you came. Now rest a moment; the wind has soiled your face," and turning to the fire she folded her delicate, blue veined hands in quietude.

Outside raged the storm, and against the panes pressed a wet, green gloom, peculiar to those forest ranges; impalpable yet alive, rising from soaked grass and encircling verdure. Very close it pressed, a weird, transparent sheet of color trying to steal in and enfold us, only to be held at bay against the panes by the sparkle of the flames, quite as her own spirit, with its radiance bars out all thought of depressing things.

INSIDE all was warmth and comfort, the firelight played over her face and those of the portraits on the walls. Close to the mantel was a small pasted, one of no great value like the other portraits, but having about it a very endearing and inspiring quality. The head, in profile, was upheld, the shoulders firmly knit, the eyes straightforward. Under the fitch on the left breast was pinned a gold medallion.

"Ah! you are looking at my dear cousin Jeannette," she said. "But take the picture down and study it. There! Now let the firelight shine on it so you can see the better. First, the powdered hair, the cap à la Marie Antoinette, and the gold medallion bearing a fleur-de-lis in its center. That, you must know, was the medallion worn by those who were faithful to the memory of the martyred King, Louis XVI., as an insignia of their fidelity, setting them apart from the hangmen, who were the 'people.' Now look at her face," she went on. "See how sweet is her smile, how luminous, yet profound, her gaze; yet it was out of the very immensity of her grief that peace was born to her, as it may be born to all of us. And she drank deep of the cup of sorrow; for she was only eighteen when a young Count fell in love with her, and, although the Revolution was then at its full,—for this was the terrible spring of 1793,—their betrothal was announced with all the ceremony belonging to their estate."

"And were they married?" I finally asked; for the

woman at my side had ceased speaking and seemed lost in reverie. My question roused her, as if from thoughts that had wandered far.

"No, one day the Count did not come. He had been arrested by the Revolutionary Committee. The next morning his head fell into the basket."

"Oh, poor girl!" I cried out in sympathy, the very tones of her voice as she told of the sad ending bringing the tears to my eyes.

"Ah, but her courage!" she exclaimed quickly, her face lighting up. "For days she lay as one dead; then she sought out her mother. Fear nothing for me, she said. 'He whom we mourn has pointed out the way. Now it is my turn to give my life to him. I am going to hunt among the people for the wickedest and the most cruel, since they are always the most unfortunate. I am going to nurse them; to heal their bodies first, that I may reach their souls.'"

"Unharmed she passed through angry mobs and crowded streets, her beautiful hair crowned by its cap à la Marie Antoinette, and always on her left breast the gold medallion. Heads were inclined to her, and like Jeanne d'Arc she moved among the multitude, converting all in her way. Her very approach made men better. And this she kept up until she was an old, old woman. She died with her lover's name on her lips."

The Lady of the Gables rose from her chair and moved about the room as if seeking her habitual calm, her head drawn higher as though she too would defy man's cruelties proudly as Jeannette had done. A long, quivering sigh escaped her as she regained her seat and continued:

"And now, she repeated slowly, 'When I want courage, she gives it to me. When I need faith, she is there as a living embodiment. She lived love too, a love of which few have ever dreamed. That is why every night before I go to sleep I say, 'Goodnight, Cousin Jeannette.'"

THE silence between us grew—a strange, pregnant silence. Unhidden questions began to form themselves; not of love's subtleties, but of hers. Why had she told me the story? Who was this woman talking of love as a living presence yet walking a solitary path? What had she been, with her manner of an old régime, yet content among the peasants, no other friend but me in twenty years? What was she, even now?

Suddenly across my troubled inner vision there began to flit, like fireflies after rain, floating memories of far off, half forgotten things—vague hints that she herself had dropped, scraps I had read in the newspapers long ago, when correspondents knew whereof they wrote. She must have divined my mental process,—willed it,

perhaps,—for while I sat, quivering and speechless, she herself broke the silence.

"You have grown very dear to me, Child," she began in low pitched tones, but into which had now crept cadences caressing as a mother's touch. "Today, when I sent for you, I said to myself, 'I wish I had no secrets from her.' I see now that you have already divined."

She paused a moment, turned a wide open, unfaltering gaze on me, and whispered two names,—her own and one other!

Instantly my mind cleared and a face stood out in all loveliness. But I did not start. Now that certainty was mine I grew cold. Something like awe crept over me. "And I mean that you shall have it all," she continued. "It is a relief to talk—I who have been silent so many years. Do not interrupt me, or I may not be able to go through to the end. Do not ask me any questions; just let me pour out my heart."

AM French, of course; but I was born in Genoa, where my grandfather had gone after the upheaval and had established himself as a banker. He was suspected of plotting against the Government, which was untrue, although we have all been Royalists. When I was seventeen I went to Venice to visit an older sister who had married an Italian Count, who was Gentleman in Waiting at the court. They lived in the Palazzo da Forstè, the one on the Grand Canal above the Salute. You have seen it, no doubt, as it is still one of the show places of Venice, although it has passed out of the city. This sister had brought me up, she being ten years older and my mother having died when I was a child.

"My coming out was celebrated by a great ball at the Palazzo, to which everyone of prominence was invited, including any distinguished strangers who might be guests of our friends. To the assembly came, including the Archbishop in his robes, and all the foreign Ambassadors, as well as officers of rank in the army and navy. It was an unforgettable sight for me, brought up as I had been in almost absolute seclusion, and the masses of gondolas, the fluttering flags and lanterns outside, and the brilliant costumes moving about the grand salon made a great impression on me.

Among others who were brought up to me and presented was a young man whose name in my excitement I did not catch. He and some of his companions had been hunting wild boar, so he told me, in the mountains of Austria, and, happening to be in Venice, and a guest

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## THE MESSAGE

Entry No. 79 in Our Prize Story Competition

HERE is where they found Staley," said Chalmers. He and his guest had paused at the head of the broad, winding stairs that help to preserve to the Standard Club its atmosphere of old fashioned spaciousness. Kent walked over to the place indicated. It was just outside an obviously temporary telephone booth.

"Had he been telephoning?" Chalmers looked up quickly. "The story has reached you, then?"

"Rumor, only."

"Club gossip has it that he fell dead from the shock of the message?"

"No man dies of mental shock, unless he is as good as dead anyway," observed Kent mildly.

"Oh, come," provoked his host. "There are cases every day."

"No. Shock may hasten, it does not cause, death. Such is the resilience of the normal nervous system that it can sustain the most extreme frightful impact."

"If you're going to be Professor Kent with me, I've in," retorted the other, with a smile. "The worst of your dogmatism is that it's generally right. And, at that, Staley wasn't in the best of condition. He'd been drinking pretty heavily since the Combination Bank scandal burst."

"He was one of your witnesses?"

"Yes," Chalmers lowered his voice. "He was one of three whose testimony will connect Overton with the smash."

"Stephen Overton? I supposed him too shrewd and too powerful to law."

"So he has been, up to now. Nobody but Overton could have carried through the Cooperative Electric Supply deal and kept out of jail. Yet he went from that to the presidency of the Real Estate Trust Company, which makes him one of the twenty most influential men in Wall Street today. And to think that ten years ago he was getting twenty-five dollars a week as an electrician!"

"You actually believe that you will get him?"

"Absolutely. And he's worried. In some way he has struck the trail of what I am doing. So he's keeping track of my two remaining witnesses, whose testimony will convict him personally. You'll see the comedy in progress in the temporary courtroom at the front of this floor. I've given my two men good cards to the club, and the four of us are playing a rubber now. By the way, it was Overton who found Staley's body."

"And you see nothing suspicious in that?"

"Am I quite a fool, then? Yet the thing was plausible."



Most People Would Have Thought Him Ordinary.

Overton came out of his rooms,—he lives at the end of this hall, next to the telephone booth,—and stumbled over poor Staley, who was quite dead. But have you got that ink analysis?"

Professor Kent nodded. "It was the old ink, wholly unlike the other."

"Then the note was postdated," said Chalmers with subdued satisfaction. "Proof conclusive. Come; the game will be waiting for me."

By SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

"Highly regrettable exhibition on the part of a rising young Assistant District Attorney," commented Kent, "this indulgence in daylight gambling!"

"Keeping track of my men," explained the lawyer, leading the way to the door of the card-room. "Martin Hall is half crazy since Staley's death. That's the facing us, with the soft-boiled face and the hard-boiled eyes."

"And his partner?"

"My other witness, Benjamin Tenney Naylor, Bass Flynn's former confidential man, known in political circles as the 'Gonnelly Naylor.'"

"He looks hard enough for it," commented Kent, eyeing the spare, powerful, weasel-faced little man. "And the florid beauty playing dummy is Overton?"

"Exactly. Queer combination, isn't it? The hunter watching the hounds, and the quarry trying to corrupt them."

"Two odd and one game in," said the florid man in a full, uncouth voice. "You're to deal, Mr. Chalmers. The Assistant District Attorney came forward and, after presenting Kent to the others, seated himself at the table."

"We'll finish this," he said, "and then Professor Kent can cut in."

CHESTER KENT sat down, ostensibly to watch the game, in reality to study the players. He had come over from Washington to help his former college mate, Robert Chalmers, in certain phases of the Combination Bank collapse. Thus far there had been two suicides, one resignation from office, a dozen indictments, and the peculiar death of Sanford Staley, as circumstances of the affair, and the shadow of jail was looming large behind sunny gentlemen of unimpeached reputations, who were ready to move heaven and earth and several puppet judges to keep matters from going off the track.

Kent's interest in the case was that of an amateur. His own position—a unique one on the Government roster, that of general scientific adviser, in secret, to the federal Department of Justice—was held on his own terms, which were that he would work when he felt like it, and not when he didn't. As he was, in his line, indispensable, and as he had an independent income, he was in a position to dictate even to a red-tape-board administration. Being, by his own interpretation of his duties in Washington, at leisure, he had responded promptly to Chalmers' appeal, and with more trenchant observation of the case than his



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of Baron Reich, one of the foreign Ambassadors, had availed himself of the opportunity to see the inside of one of the famous Venetian palaces when in gala appointment.

"At first I did not pay much attention to him, so many others crowded about me; but as the evening wore on I found I was never out of his sight. He was then but twenty-two years old, very tall and straight, with broad shoulders and an alert air about him, as if he thought as quickly as he moved. He had too an air of great distinction for one so young, and with it a tender, gentle courtesy, which, I think, was what impressed me more than anything else. I noticed this particularly when, instead of bringing me back to my sister when the dance was over, he made excuse to drag aside the heavy silk curtains, and led me out on the balcony, from which we both looked down on the wonderful city, with the moonlight flooding everything. I was afraid to stay, of course, shut from everyone's gaze by the portiere; but it gave him an opportunity to whisper in my ear, 'I am coming tomorrow, and you must try to see me, for I leave Venice at night!'

"When you are seventeen, my child, and for the first time in your life a man you do not dislike seeks an appointment, you go to bed with your heart in wild alarm.

THE next afternoon he came in his own gondola, his men in scarlet and gold, and we all went—my sister acting as chaperon—out of the lagoon and watched the sun set behind the hills of the lagoon. And that night he came again, saying he had postponed his departure until after the Festival of the Redentore, which was to take place the following week. And then there were more talks on the balcony in the moonlight—and soon I began to be awake in the night and watch for his gondola rounding out of the little canal up which the Ambassador lived, and my sister began to laugh and say I was in love—I, who was only a child!

"When the night of the Redentore came we dined in the garden for that matter, brilliant in light and color. After feasting and singing all night, we waited for the first streak of dawn, and were rowed over by our gondoliers to the *fiato*, the seashore, to see the end of the festival, when everybody jumps overboard into the water as the sun peeps above the horizon. I wanted, girl like, to see the others jump, and in my eagerness lost my balance and was floundering in the water before anyone knew I had slipped.

"The next thing I felt was an arm under my neck; then I was lifted bodily in the dark, my head clear of the water. He had sprung overboard, had gathered me to his breast, and with the other arm was raising us both to the boat. Then, waving the gondolier back, he grasped the side, threw one leg over the edge, and dragging me clear had me dripping wet in the gondola, and then, still in the dark, bent down close and kissed me—the first kiss of my life!

THE next day he wrote to my father asking for my hand.

"Now came my first surprise,—my lover was not Count Foglietti, son of a man of rank and heir to his estates in Hungary; but a Crown Prince, heir to a throne in the Balkans. His iniquity and the facts were known to my husband in law. That it had never been told me was because, as he said, no one could suppose for an instant that a man of Count Foglietti's experience and obligations could possibly make so great a fool of himself as to offer marriage to the daughter of a Genoese banker. Anyhow, it must be stopped, and at once! Even if the ceremony took place, it could only be a moribund marriage, ending in misery and perhaps disgrace. 'No! He would inform the father to act. Furthermore, the unsettled political conditions in his Kingdom made it all the more dangerous. It was only a question of time before his father would be deposed and the throne fall to him. Even should he renounce all title to the succession, his younger brother, who was an invalid and unpopular, would not be permitted to accept the crown. The young Prince had lost his head and should be sent home to his father at once!'

"I shall never forget my talk with him that night. No one disturbed us on the balcony, and we had it all to ourselves. I left him with his lips to mine,—he telling me of his determination to renounce his succession to the throne, that he loved nothing but me and would let nothing stand in the way of our marriage. The next day the Ambassador came to the palazzo, and after a long talk

with my brother in law I was sent for. It could be arranged, after all, said his Excellency; in fact, it would be better for the peace of the country if my Prince stepped out and the younger brother stepped in, for both his ill health and his unpopularity had been exaggerated.

But my brother in law was not satisfied. The Archbishop must be seen, and certain papers must be signed in his presence and in the presence of the Chief Counselor of the Italian court, and these the Ambassador must witness.

And all this was done, my child, neither of us caring anything about the details so we were brought together and kept together. It was all carried out, and it took some months, during which we lived in dreamland. My father came on, and our wedding took place with all Venice and much of Rome and Genoa present.

"My father bought as a villa up in the hills where the shooting was good and the air fine and healthy; and there we spent our honeymoon and the three first years of our married life, shut out from the world, living for each other, and knowing nothing, caring nothing, of what went on outside our beloved hills.

THEN came the Revolution which you have heard of so often, with all its terrors and treachery and murders. Letters from my husband's home began to arrive; to none of which did he pay any attention—some he did not even open. One informed him that the younger brother was about to mount the throne, and that this meant ruin to the country and great suffering among the people, already groaning under the burdens of hunger and cruelty. This last he answered, refusing to leave me and his mountain home, no matter what happened, saying that he had retired with the full consent of his father, and that he would never set foot on his native soil again except as a private citizen.

ONE morning when we were breakfasting under our grape arbor in the garden I noticed a carriage driving past the lower gate, and from it stepped the Ambassador and two officers in full uniform, one a man of forty and the other a gray-haired man of seventy. They walked straight to where we sat, and drawing themselves up to their full height made a salute that is given only to royal personages. My husband knew them both and introduced them to me. One was a distinguished cavalry officer, and the other was Chief of Staff of the army.

"They had come today before him the condition of the country and to beg him in the name of peace and his people, who were suffering the most horrible outrages, to return and take up the reins of government. His brother, since his father's death, was practically a prisoner, and no one could tell what would happen if matters were allowed to go on in this way. There was even fear that their country might be annexed to a neighboring Power on the plea of its being unable to rule or govern itself.

"Next they appealed to me. I would not, being a woman, suffer such wrongs to continue, if I could only see the conditions as they existed. This overcame me, and I answered:

"Yes, we will both go."

"I saw the old General hesitate and take the Ambassador to one side; but the younger officer was more loquacious.

"His Highness must go alone, Madame," he said.

"But I will not be separated from my wife!" said my husband.

"It cannot be! She is your wife here; but not at home. Our people would insist on a bride of their own blood and your own rank." My husband turned on his heel, called a servant, and said, "Order the carriage of their Excellencies," then, addressing the three, "Messieurs, the interview is at an end. I wish you a respectful adieu," and went into the house.

AND now, my child, came the beginning of the end. Every influence was brought to bear, both by the Italian and the Austrian Governments, and a compromise was made by which my husband was to spend a year without me, and then I was to join him. This he consented to under promise that a special act would be sanctioned by which I was still to hold my position as his lawful wife.

"I came quite all that followed. Villains of every kind was brought to bear to declare our marriage invalid. So transparent was



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the fraud that my brother in law, having the sympathy of the Italian Government, threatened to make an international matter of it, I being born an Italian son. Finally the Archduke was sent for. And then came the most cruel of all my disappointments: His Grace showed his orders from the Vatican nullifying the marriage on some technical religious grounds.

"It now became a question of my husband's life. To save it I destroyed the papers in the presence of the Ambassador, the Archbishop, and my brother in law, and that night left Venice."

"For two years I hid myself in my father's house in Genoa. Then after the death of my dear husband I came here. Today the world knows me only as a woman who sacrificed

her all for a man who deserted her,—none of which is true; for he loved me to the end, and died with my name on his lips."

She paused, stretched out her hand and, smoothing my hair with her soft, white hand, said, "And now, dear child, you know why it is that every night before I sleep I look over at her portrait and say, Goodnight, Cousine Fanchette—au revoir!" It was the example she set that I have tried to follow when love was torn from me."

THE storm is still raging now as I finish her story. Against her windows too the wind and rain are beating; less fierce than other storms that have assailed her, because not blown by calamity. Goodnight, brave soul, good-night!

## THE RETURN

visible through his open window was clear and sunny. A heavy, no-tinted cloud drifted across its azure. In the distance robins called, and a passing breeze brought in a train an odor of blossoming lilacs, moist and entrancing. And suddenly the far sky had given place to the leaden stain of a new dawn, and he had just seen Mary—and she was coming down!

She was in simple white, just as he had last seen her, and in her arms she cradled a small white bundle. Her glance held all the sweetness of womanhood in it, but the wide eyes above were wistful. And what was this that they loved behind her? The vision faded, and almost before the white cloud had dispersed the man was out of bed, dressing, ordering a hack to take him to the station. He had no idea what the vision meant; but a long hushed something was stirring within him, and he felt that he had received a psychic summons. Out of the past long silent valleys called him, and in obedience he was hastening "home."

THE rain drew into the shabby, well-remembered station, and he swung off and made his way into Main-st., which showed but few changes. Nobody recognized him, of course; but he saw one or two faces familiar despite Time's relentless markings, and he heard a couple of drug-store brokers speak of "the Lewes funeral."

After that he dared not voice the intention. He could only push on straight to Mary's old dwelling. His heart leaped to find it scarcely changed just as when he went away. The black old but still thrifty, were alabaster in the doorway. It had rained that morning, and the soft air seemed bathed in their glorious perfume. The same huge bush still knelt over the porch rail as in welcome, and when, trembling a little, he rang the bell, Mary herself answered the door a moment later. At sight of her David felt a thrill that told him how thorough was this strange resurrection of his long apostrophized soul. He could have worshipped her as she stood there, amazed but smiling, with her simple white gown falling softly about her, and a little downy head cuddled into the "divine hollow" of her slender throat.

"Mary," he cried, and found his voice no more than a whisper. "I thought—"

"No," she told him, seeing that he could not finish, "that was Sheila. We buried her yesterday."

He gazed as he stood, and her eyes, sad and tender with long love and sorrow, said that he suffered. She young the door wider. "Won't you—come in?"

This time it was he who would have lingered in the sunshine; but she led the way, just as of old, to the cool, dim parlor, uncanonically haunted by lingering scent of yesterday's flowers. Again as of old she sank into the low rocker and deftly mended the stringing baby. While she crooned it back to sleep David studied her eagerly. She was paler than he remembered, and the red lips curved to unmoored pathos; but otherwise the years that had left him gray and lined seemed to have made slight impression upon her. Her face was still like a delicate flower, her eyes blue, her hair bright as ever. But that the baby in her arms was smaller than had been that earlier infant, the whole scene might have been the same.

She looked up presently, calm and sweet as ever, and he began to ask questions.

"Your father, Mary?"

"Oh, Father is well," smiling brightly. "He is an old man now,—you remember he was always the kind of man to grow old early,—but he has good health and is happy. He married again the year after you went West."

"The children?"

"The children?" The smile was infinitely sad now, and the wide eyes darkened.

"They haven't been children for sometime, Stanley, though they seemed a long while growing up. Mrs.—my father's wife, didn't dare to have them in the same house with her, so father went to her home and we stayed on here together. Billy's practicing law in New York now, married and doing fine. The first break came when he went to Harvard. The baby died in its second summer. And Sheila," her voice breaking, "was married early last year. Her husband died suddenly, two weeks ago, and the shock killed her. This is her baby. History repeats itself, Stanley, a tear fell on the baby's head suddenly! 'Sheila, dying, gave her baby to me.'"

A LONG moment of silence; then, on the man's part, a burst of passionate self reproach.

"I do think that we might have had twenty years together! I could have made a home for you and the children almost from the beginning. But I was money mad at first, and then—I got entangled. And when freedom came I paid the price in having my soul shutty in inches. I thought of nothing but business success for years, until the day before yesterday. And now—"

Her eyes, deep and still with the wisdom of long and loving patience, bade him continue, but instead of finishing the broken sentence he leaned forward to grasp her unscarred hand.

"Mary," and the starvation of a cheated lifetime gave tenacity to face and tone, "God knows I've little enough to offer you now—nothing but uncertain health and the money for which I've forfeited everything worth while,—but I've always loved you. And you're too sweet and good to judge harshly. Forgive me all my sins. Dear, and be my wife now, even though I don't deserve it. We've lost so much happiness already, and only my stupid self to blame for everything. But I can't let you begin again—alone—with this child, Mary, and I feel that I can't live longer without you. I'll do anything you bid, live where you please, obey your slightest wish, sweetheart. Only—don't say that you don't love me, that I've forfeited all joy in the future by the stupid wrong of the past!"

SHE was silent so long, her eyes closed, her mouth quivering, that his soul shivered with fear of what might have happened during his twenty years of absence. She wore no wedding ring; but this might mean nothing. Perhaps she was no longer free to love him; perhaps some more decent fellow had won her these many moons back. Perhaps—

His heart failed him, and a keen sword of pain smote through it. Of course it was just, this punishment; he would have deemed it light in the case of another such sinner. And yet—Mary! Somehow it had seemed that she must always be faithful, even if he were faithless. And never, God help him! had he loved her as now.

"Mary!" he cried again, and at sound of his breaking voice the arm of remote and impersonal sweetness that held him aloof was flushed to wonder by the message of her lifted eyelids. Without conscious movement he found himself on his knees by her chair, his eager arms enfolding both herself and the sleeping baby, her head on his shoulder. His joyous exclamation of "Mary!" snatched the last shred of ice from between them. Her long, curling eyelashes modestly veiled a bliss too ineffable for common day light.

"I—I suppose they'll say I have no spirit," she whispered. "But—I've always loved you, Stanley, always remembered you, even when you seemed to have forgotten me utterly. And—if you'll let me bring Sheila's baby—I'll marry you whenever you like, my dearest dear!"

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